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# "THE GIFTS WORTHY OF HIS NAME": MATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF SAFAVID-MUGHAL DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES*

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Gift-giving was generally an accepted practice in early modern diplomatic contexts. The gift exchange was an integral and essential part of both Safavid and Mughal diplomacy. Despite the occasional outbreak of hostilities, Mughal-Safavid relations were mostly marked by concord and appreciation of each other's vital interests. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, countless gifts were exchanged between the Safavid and Mughal rulers. The role of gifts in Safavid-Mughal diplomatic encounters is particularly apparent from the numerous references in the local chronicles and reactions of the rulers to the gifts offered to them. The Safavids and Mughals viewed the exchange of diplomatic gifts as a matter of political significance. They used gifts to influence diplomatic relations with each other. Gifts accompanied the embassies that were dispatched for various purposes, including, but not limited to congratulating on ascension, offering condolences, informing the counterpart on victories, delivering "letter of victories" or taking part in circumcision festivals. The display of cultural affinity and close

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bonds between these two polities was manifested and materialized in the carefully selected gifts. The gift-giving has always been a prominent topic in the field of anthropology since the publication of sociologist Marcel Mauss's Essay on the Gift in 1925. Although the existing historiography notes the essential role of gift-giving in the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations, little has been done to explore the history of Safavid-Mughal relations from the perspective of material culture. Safavid-Mughal interrelations have mainly been analysed through the lens of political relations, and correspondingly, the gift exchanges have generally been discussed as part of the larger topic of diplomatic relations between the two powers. Drawing on contemporary Safavid and Mughal chronicles, as well as European travelogues, this paper attempts to explore how gift exchanges functioned within Mughal-Safavid diplomatic relations.

**Keywords:** Safavids, Mughal Empire, Safavid-Mughal relations, early modern diplomacy, diplomatic gifts, gift-giving, 16–17th centuries

## 1. Introduction

Gift-giving was generally an accepted practice in early modern diplomatic contexts. Lavish gifts were indispensable elements of every diplomatic mission and served to create, preserve, and strengthen political relationships, project dynastic self-conception, as well as enhance a monarch's image. Diplomatic gifts were a vehicle of self-representation abroad. Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, countless gifts were exchanged between the Safavid and Mughal rulers. Both courts used gifts to influence diplomatic relations with each other. The consistent references to the Safavid-Mughal gift exchanges in the chronicles and diplomatic correspondence demonstrate the importance of the material dimension of the diplomatic encounters between these two powers [Guliyev 2024a, *516*]. Safavid and Mughal chronicles and diplomatic letters highlight the importance of gifts as a symbol of friendship and goodwill. As for the major items, both courts put more emphasis on the variety and the quality of diplomatic gifts than on the quantity. The values of the gifts exchanged between these courts demonstrate the importance that both parties placed on their mutual relations.

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Particularly, for important missions, such as the accession to the throne of a new ruler, it was important for the envoy to bring with him a large number of gifts. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, unlike the major European powers, neither the Safavid nor the Mughal empires maintained permanent embassies abroad. Both the Safavids and Mughals relied on temporary embassies dispatched for a particular mission, which would return home upon its completion [Guliyev 2024b, *167*]. A list of gifts was always sent along with the royal letter. Envoys were instructed regarding the proper presentation of gifts in foreign courts. For instance, there was a letter from Shah ʿAbbās I (r. 1587–1629) to his envoy Zeynal Beg instructing him how to present gifts to the Mughal ruler [Munshi 1978, 3, *1216*]. In addition to the royal gifts, envoys offered their own presents to the host ruler, and the envoy's status was represented and negotiated by the gifts he offered.

The gift-giving has always been a prominent topic in the field of anthropology since the publication of sociologist Marcel Mauss's famous "Essay on the Gift" in 1925 [Mauss 1925]. Safavid-Mughal diplomatic gift exchanges have usually been studied [Edwards 1915–1917; Rahim 1934–1935; Islam 1970] as part of the general topic of diplomatic relations between these two states. Few studies have attempted to explore the history of Safavid-Mughal relations from the perspective of material culture. For instance, Sharon Littlefield [1999] examined the works of art exchanged as diplomatic gifts between the courts of the Mughal emperor Jahāngir (r. 1605–1627). Recently, Ahmad Guliyev [2024a] studied the 'regifting' phenomenon in Safavid-Mughal gift exchanges, particularly the role of the Safavids in the circulation of objects between the Mughal and Ottoman empires. Drawing on contemporary Safavid and Mughal chronicles, as well as European travelogues, this paper attempts to explore how gift exchanges functioned within Mughal-Safavid diplomatic relations. The research will also attempt to address the following questions: How well do material objects exchanged reflect the value system of these respective cultures? What made an object worthy of being gifted in the Safavid and Mughal contexts? Did the Safavid and Mughal rulers and their envoys share a common understanding of what was worthy of giving and the symbolic power of the given objects?

**2. Selection of the gifts**

The gifts could be seen as a barometer of the political, social, and economic condition of the sending country. The composition of the Safavid and Mughal gift packages usually reflected the traditional features of diplomatic practice, but at the same time, it was subject to changes and varied in accordance with the importance of the mission, actual circumstances, and overall nature of the relations between these two polities, and sometimes it was personalized and tailored to the specific occasion. Sharon Littlefield argues that "gifting could change the way an object was valued – whether economical, social, or aesthetic" [Littlefield 1999, *177*]. The intensity of the gift exchanges and the value of the gifts exchanged reflected the state of the Mughal-Safavid relationship. For example, the reigns of Safavid Shah ʿAbbās I and Mughal Jahāngir saw a considerable increase in diplomatic contacts between the Safavid and Mughal courts. Accordingly, Safavid-Mughal gift exchanges reached their peak during the reigns of Shah ʿAbbās I and his Mughal counterpart Jahāngir, mainly due to their personal relationship based on mutual esteem [Munshi 1978, 3, *1216*].

As it is evident from the contemporary sources, the gifts selected had to be appropriate for the mission and compatible with the status of both sides [Munshi 1978, 2, *980*]. In most cases, the rulers took part in the selection of the gifts for their counterparts and also personally inspected the gifts received [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 3, *1236–1237*; Manucci 1907, 2, *50–51*]. For example, Francis Bernier notes that "[Mugal emperor] Aurangzeb seemed unusually pleased with this splendid present; he examined every item minutely, noticed its elegance and rarity, and frequently extolled the munificence of the King of Persia" [Bernier 1916, *148*]. According to the Mughal chronicler Abul Fazl, Shah ʿAbbās personally scrutinized the presents brought by Mughal envoy Mir Muhammad Masum Mokri (Bhakari) in 1603 [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 3, *1236–1237*].

The Safavid gifts were highly regarded by the Mughal rulers and chroniclers. For instance, in his reply letter to Shah ʿAbbās, dated probably 1022/1613, Jahāngir praised the valuable gifts brought by Uwaisi Beg, including horses and *mumya'i* (a medicine) sent by the Shah, and expressed pleasure at their receipt [BL, I.O. Islamic 379, *55b*]. While demands for certain items were already known, gift lists

were obviously drawn up by taking the tastes of the prospective recipients into account. For example, by offering valuable things like looking glasses, crystal vessels, and precious textiles from Venice, Shah ʿAbbās proved to be well aware of Jahāngir's demand for European rarities [Jahangirnama 1999, *186*; Roe 1926, *259*; Guliyev 2024a, *522, 525*].

The Safavid court sent diplomatic gifts that represented the country's craftsmanship and artistic capacity, as well as exclusive objects that had a cross-cultural valence characterized by a high monetary value, rarity, costly material, and aesthetic value. Some goods selected for Mughal rulers served as a promotion of local products and commercial advertisement of the country's manufacturing and artisanal skills. For instance, in his letters to Shah ʿAbbās I, Prince Khurram (Shah Jahān) wrote that he had sent samples of the various products of this land (India) [BL, Or. 3482, *245a–b*; Islam 1979–1982, 1, *225*]. This could also have been associated with commercial advertising. Diplomacy was closely linked to commercial relations. The main aim of the purchasing missions was also to acquire rarities of the destination. In 1641, a sum of money from the Safavid treasury had been advanced to royal purveyor Mirza Asadullah Tabrizi in order to purchase rarities for Shah Safi I (r. 1629–1642) [Islam 1979–1982, 1, *157*].

**3. Rarity and Reciprocity in Diplomatic Gift Exchanges**

The material and artistic values of the gifts were the two main prerequisites for their valuation. Above all, a present for a ruler had to be a costly, luxurious, and rare item. Usually, such gifts were selected on the basis of rarity and exoticism as well as value [Qaddūmī 1996, *5*]. The rarity of the artefact was among the determinants of its value, and a gift had the highest value when it was considered a rarity. Therefore, the presents were particularly appreciated when they had an exotic nature or rare value. Rarity always played an important role in gift exchanges between the Safavid and Mughal polities, and they regularly exchanged gifts with a preference for rare and costly presents. The rarity and value of the gifts, to a great extent, determined the impression that the embassy created on the other monarch.

Safavid and Mughal chronicles frequently mention 'rarities' or 'choice objects' in connection with diplomatic gifts. In this sense, 'rarities' were often used as synonyms for the 'desired' or 'choice' diplomatic gift objects [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 2, 358, 3, *893–894*,

*1112–1113*;Ināyat Khān 1990, *84*]. The consistent references to the rare artefacts in the descriptions of gift packages suggest that both Safavid and Mughal rulers preferred not to offer diplomatic gifts that might not have been considered as select or curious objects. Rarities form part of gifts as they are designed to please and impress.

Both Mughal and Safavid rulers particularly distinguished certain gifts for their rarity in the gift packages they sent or received. The rarity of the gift was stressed by its provenance, colour, and uniqueness in its type. Circulation of rare objects through diplomatic gift exchanges also contributed to the rise of the culture of collecting. In 1624, following the capture of Baghdad from the Ottomans, Shah ʿAbbās I sent a white falcon to Jahāngir as a gift "because of its rarity" [BL, Or. 3482, *240a*; Islam 1979–1982, 1, *216*]. In a similar way, due to its rarity, a zebra, which had previously been acquired from the Ottoman subjects travelling to the Mughal Empire from Ethiopia, was included among the royal gifts sent from Jahāngir to Shahʿ Abbās [Jahangirnama 1999, *360*]. Rare animals were also the subject of the Mughal painting. The likeness of a zebra, which was sent as a gift to Shah ʿAbbās, was drawn by Nadir'ul-'asri ("Wonder of the Age") Master Mansur in 1620–1621 [The Victoria and Albert Museum, *IM.23–1925*].

The rulers of both powers offered each other the things that they appreciated themselves. The choice of a particular object as a gift not only represented the taste of the donor but also provided the opportunity to show empathy and respond to the needs of the recipient. This was also noticed by the Europeans visiting the Mughal and Safavid courts. According to Tavernier, ambassadors made presents to the Mughal ruler, "of whatever was most rare in their respective countries" [Tavernier 1925, Vol. 1, *297*].

The commodity value of the gifts was important both to the donor and to the recipient [Simpson 2011, *134*]. The custom of assessing and recording the monetary value of gifts brought by foreign missions was a common practice observed by early modern states. Besides the monetary value, both the Safavids and Mughals also recorded the numbers and weights of some gifts sent and received, as they appear in lists given by their respective chroniclers. Sometimes, the narrative sources do not specify the gifts sent or received, and they rather include the phrase "gifts and presents without number." The value of the return gifts was determined by considerations of the status

and the prestige of both donor and recipient, actual circumstances, as well as by political expediency and the purpose to be achieved [Rosenthal 1986, *344a*].

In the Safavid and Mughal context, diplomatic exchange had a nature of competition for prestige, and return gifts typically exceeded the value of the received. For example, the gift package brought to the Mughal court in March 1631 by the Safavid envoy Muhammad Ali Beg, valued at 3 *lakhs* of rupees, and two or three days afterward, his own offering amounting to 50,000 rupees [Lahori 1868, 1, *366*]. According to Inayat Khan, reciprocated gifts by Shah Jahān consisted of 3 *lakhs* and 16,000 rupees in cash, besides about one lakh worth of goods [Ināyat Khān 1990, *87*].

The gift package sent in 1661 by Shah ʿAbbās II (r. 1642–1666) to the Mughal court of Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) was valued at 4 lakhs and 20,000 rupees, which was reciprocated with a gift package worth 5 *lakhs* of rupees and 35,000 rupees [Saqi 1947, *22*]. In comparison, two years later, Mughal envoy Tarbiyat Khan was dispatched with gifts worth 7 *lakhs* of rupees [Saqi 1947, *29*]. The gifts exchanged between the Safavid and the Mughal courts were as much a competition in splendour as was the Safavid exchange with the Ottoman court (for Ottoman-Safavid diplomatic gift exchanges, see [Casale 2023]).

**4. Types of the gifts exchanged**

*Textile gifts*

The role of textiles as mediators in early modern diplomatic exchanges has been increasingly emphasized by scholars [Anderson 2016, *63*]. The most popular gifts, given regularly by both sides, were textiles, especially luxury silk fabrics. Textile items had a special place in the composition of Safavid and Mughal diplomatic gifts. Since textiles could easily be moved, they became a medium for the transmission of artistic themes within the Muslim world and beyond its frontiers [Kuiper 2010, *126–127*]. Textile items were objects that held cross-cultural appeal among both Safavid and Mughal dignitaries, and the use of luxury textiles as diplomatic gifts indicated commonalities and shared elite tastes. For the Safavids, the most desirable and lucrative commodities were probably silks, which reached their technical and artistic pinnacle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [Guliyev 2022, *66*]. In the early modern world, textiles were the most important gift item, emphasizing the noble status of the recipient and a vehicle for all other kinds of social recognition. Silk fabric,

often associated with luxury and wealth, served as a form of artistic expression. Textiles were central in the strengthening of political and social ties in early-modern Middle Eastern polities, including the Safavid and Mughal states.

Textiles were offered in a variety of forms, such as ceremonial robes and headgear, various types of garments and furnishings, floor coverings, tents and horse covers, and caparisons. Lavish textiles composed one of the main items in both Safavid and Mughal gift packages. Luxurious fabrics were standard gifts for the sovereigns, and the types and quantity of these textiles varied depending on the occasion. One of the most recurring acts of Safavid-Mughal gift exchange, frequently reported by the sources, was the distribution of honorific robes – *khilats* along with money to the incoming envoys and their retinue on the reception ceremony at the host court.

Cloth of gold was one of the symbols of royalty and nobility, and it demonstrates that the choice of gifts was related to the status attributed to the recipient. According to Munshi, in 1598, Shah ʻAbbās I dispatched Safavid envoy Manuchehr Beg to the Mughal court bearing precious gifts "without number" [Munshi 1978, 2, *723*]. Abul Fazl notes that "among the gifts, there were 300 pieces of brocade – all woven by the hands of noted weavers – and fifty masterpieces of Ghiyas Naqshband; embroidered mattresses and silk (khārā)" [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 3, *1113*]. Ghiyath al-Din ʿAli Naqshband was a weaver of figured silks of a particularly rich kind (velvet and brocade fabrics). He was born in Yazd but worked at the court of Shah ʿAbbās I [Ackerman 1934, *9*]. His name was known beyond the Safavid frontiers, and his figured fabrics were highly prized [Spuhler 1986, *723*].

Gold and silver brocaded silk velvets were types of textile gifts favored by the Mughals, as it appears from the gift packages of the Safavids, who sent them in large quantities. For instance, in 1611, Safavid envoy Yādgārʿ Alī Sulṭān was dispatched with one thousand five hundred pieces of brocade squares; European and Chinese satins and velvets; precious stuff from Yazd and Kashan [Munshi 1978, 2, *979*]. In 1620, Aqa Beg and Muhibb-Ali, envoys of Shah ʿAbbās I, presented 27 bolts of gold brocade, 3 of gold-spun velvet, along with other gifts [Jahangirnama 1999, *359*].

In 1619, the Italian traveler Della Valle reports that, along with other gifts, Khan Alam brought 29 camels loaded with fine cloth and

fabrics, more than a hundred basins full of turbans, and there were 5 or 6 turbans in each of them [Della Valle 1843, 1, *833–834*]. In 1633, Mughal envoy Safdar Khan was dispatched together with gifts, the total value of which amounted to 4 *lakhs* of rupees. According to Lahori, of this amount, 3 *lakhs* of rupees were spent for the purchase of valuable cloth manufactured in Ahmedabad, Patna, and Benares [Lahori 1868, 1, *477–478*]. According to Abul Fazl, "good cotton cloths are woven in Patan, which were taken to distant parts as gifts of value" [Ain-i-Akbari 1949, 2, *247*]. He adds that imitations of stuff from the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the Safavid realm were also produced in Gujarat [Ain-i-Akbari 1949, 2, *247*].

Ceremonial tents seem to have always been highly valued as gifts by both Safavid and Mughal courts. Della Valle recounts that in 1619, Mughal envoy Hafiz Hasan brought a large gilded pavilion along with other gifts [Della Valle 1843, 1, *833–834*]. According to the Florentine report, dated 23 May 1665, a lavish gift package brought by a Mughal envoy included three country pavilions, all covered with pearls [Trentacoste 2021, *473*].

In addition to local textile products, the Safavids sent Ottoman (*Rumi*), European (*Firangi*), and Chinese fabrics, displaying their access to commodities produced by their respective neighbors or trading partners. The Mughals, on the other hand, regularly sent woolen textiles (e.g., Kashmir shawls), muslins, velvet, silk, and wool clothes. Sometimes, the Safavid items, along with European, Ottoman, and Chinese objects, were included in the gift packages offered by the Mughal grandees to the ruler and members of the dynasty. For instance, Mirzaʿ Aziz Koka, one of the leading emirs at the Mughal court, made lavish gifts to Akbar (r. 1556–1605), including silver, fabrics of Europe, Ottoman and China and Yezd, and other presents [Niẓām al-Dīn 1939, 2, *364–365*].

Like many other textile items of Safavid manufacture, carpets also figure as diplomatic gifts presented to the Mughal court. Abul Fazl reports that "the wonderful carpets, which cost in Persia 300 tumāns a pair and choice *takya-namads* (coverlets)" were included in the gift package offered to the Mughal ruler Jahāngir [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 3, *1113*]. According to Jahangirnama, Safavid envoys Muḥibbʿ Alī and Āqā Beg presented two pairs of carpets and two *takya-namads* (woollen coverlets) [Jahangirnama 1999, *359*].

References to the carpets among the gifts offered to the Mughal rulers could also be found in the travelogues by European authors. For example, according to Sir Thomas Roe, in 1616, Muḥammad Riza Beg, the Safavid envoy to the Mughal court of Jahāngir, brought numerous diplomatic gifts, including eight silk carpets [Roe 1990, *259*]. In 1661, François Bernier reported that among the gifts brought by the Safavid envoy Budaq Beg, there were "five or six carpets of extraordinary size and beauty" [Bernier 1916, *147–148*]. Manucci and Tavernier mention 12 finely worked Safavid carpets of fifteen cubits (≈ 6.9 meters) in length and five (≈ 2.3 meters) in breadth among the gifts brought by Budaq Beg [Manucci 1907, 2, *50–51*; Tavernier 1925, 1, *298*]. Carpets were also frequently included in the diplomatic gift packages offered to the Europeans, particularly to the Venetian rulers [Guliyev 2023, *36–37*].

*Gemstones and jewels*

Gems and jewels were among the common diplomatic gifts for rulers in the pre-modern period. They transferred material value across space and time and were highly appreciated as diplomatic gifts for their beauty, rarity, and value, as well as artistic expression and symbolic significance. Most of the gemstones were used not only for jewellery but also for various medical purposes. As a sign of kingly status, military objects, particularly scabbards, hilts of swords, and harnesses, were ornamented with precious stones.

Gemstones obtained through the diplomatic gift exchanges apparently did not meet the increased demands of the Mughal court for such objects. Therefore, in the early eighteenth century, Mughal emperor Jahāngir commissioned his agents to purchase precious stones along with other needed items for the Mughal court. Shah ʿAbbās, aware of Jahāngir's interest in such items, entrusted the agents of the Mughal ruler with rubies originally belonging to the endowments of Mashhad[1]. The statement of prices was also enclosed with the rubies [BL, Or. 3482, *235b–236a*]. In another case, shah sent through Jahāngir's agent some rubies, one of them inscribed with the names of Timurid rulers. These rubies were sent in a box which had been procured from Europe, which was later ornamented by the Safavid master craftsmen [BL, Or. 3482, *229a–230a*; Islam 1979–1982, 1, *179*].

[1] This is probably the *Astan-e Qods-e Razavi*. See [Farimani 2023; Farhat 2014].

In 1661, Shah ʿAbbās II presented to Aurangzeb, along with other gifts, a round pearl weighing 37 carats [Saqi 1947, *22*].

In 1646, Mughal envoy Jan Nisar Khan was dispatched together with a rare gift of some jeweled articles along with other presents, the total value of which amounted to 3 lakhs and 50,000 rupees [Ināyat Khān 1990, *338*]. According to Lahori, of this amount jeweled articles were valued at 1 lakh of rupees [Lahori 1868, 2, *493*]. In 1647, following Jan Nisar Khan, Arslan Beg arrived with a diamond-engraved sword, exquisite jewels, and luggage of fabrics [Isfahani 2003, *434*]. According to Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, in 1664, a diamond weighing about 60 carats was among the gifts presented to Shah ʿAbbās II by the Mughal envoy Tarbiyat Khan [Tavernier 1925, 1, *297*].

*Food gifts*

In the Mughal and Safavid chronicles one can come across several instances where food is served, shared, gifted, or presented. Narayanan argues that food embodied a certain intimacy between the giver and the receiver since food is taken into the body and eventually becomes a part of the receiver's person [Narayanan 2015, *53*]. The gifting and sharing of food could, at various times, convey messages of friendship and goodwill, or status and power. In 1661, when a Safavid envoy, Budaq Beg, arrived at Delhi, food from the Mughal Emperor's own table was sent to him [Saqi 1947, *21*]. The identity and social status of the giver and receiver were also crucial to the construction of these meanings [Narayanan 2015, *47*].

Fruits were one of the most common food products used in Safavid and Mughal gift-giving practices. Both Safavid and Mughal courts appear to have appreciated fruits presented as gifts. Accounts of Europeans highlighted the significance of fruits as a diplomatic gift. For the Mughals, melon was one of the most prized fruits gifted by the Safavids. According to Chardin, Najaf Quli Beg (Negef Coulibec) was sent by the King of Persia as Ambassador in the year 1664, in order to report the safe arrival of the Mogul's Ambassador in Persia and to convey a present of melons and other fruits [Chardin 1711, 8, *213*][2]. According to Muhammad Kazim, an author of

[2] Chardin did not give details on whether the melons were transported in fresh or dried form. In early modern times, some fruits, including melons, were dried to preserve them for longer journeys. Considering that the Safavid envoy traveled to the Mughal realm during the cold months, it is possible that he brought fresh melons.

*ʿĀlamgirnāma*, Najaf Quli Beg who arrived in February 1666, brought 2000 melons for Aurangzeb [Islam 1970, *127*].

The fruit was associated with sugar and sweetness, which conveyed the symbolic messages of goodwill and friendship [Narayanan 2015, *48*]. According to Peçevi, in 1618, following the renewal of the peace treaty Shah ʿAbbās I, as tokens of his friendship and goodwill, sent several (nine) camel loads of sweetmeats, preserved fruits of various sorts, of lemons and oranges, of fine flour, of rice, and sugar to the Ottoman Grand Vizier and some other dignitaries [Peçevi 1982, 2, *345*].

Certain foods had a particular significance. As it is evident from Shah ʿAbbās II's letter, the betel leaf was particularly favoured by the Safavid ruler. In 1661, Shah ʿAbbās II, in his letter to his envoy Budaq Sultan, Tufangchi-aqasi, at the Mughal court, expressed his pleasure at the continuous supply of pan (betel-leaf), especially those wrapped in *bārjāma-i Lahouri* (cloth packing of Lahore make) which kept the stuff fresh and green [Islam 1979–1982, 1, *443*]. According to Manucci, on mastication, this gives a pleasant odour to the mouth [Manucci 1907, 2, *128*]. In 1632, a jeweled pan casket was included in the gifts offered to Muhammad Ali Beg, a Safavid envoy to Shah Jahān [Ināyat Khān 1990, *84*]. This can serve as an indication of the Mughal court's effort to respond to the tastes of the Safavid ruler.

*Bid-meshk*

*Bid-meshk* (Salix aegyptiaca) served a number of purposes in early modern societies. For a long time, it has been used in traditional medicines for the relief of anemia and vertigo, as a cardiotonic agent, as well as a fragrance additive in the preparation of local candies [Asgarpanah 2012, *7145*]. Some physicians-pharmacologists of the medieval period indicated the medicinal properties of the musk willow [Eilers, Aʿlam 1989]. Manucci notes that in 1661, Safavid envoy Budaq Beg brought twenty cases of water, distilled from a flower, which is only found in Persia and is called bedemus (*bed-i - mushk*)[3] [Manucci 1907, 2, *51*]. He also adds that "it is a very comforting water against all fevers caused by heat" [Manucci 1907, 2, *51*].

*Rose-water*

Despite the use of roses for remedial and culinary purposes having been documented in medieval Persian texts, it was, during the Safavid

[3] For more, see [Floor 2000].

dynasty in the 16th century, that the production of rose water began to flourish with the establishment of rose water distilleries in the city of Kashan. It is widely used in sherbets, sweetmeats, as a home medicament, and on some religious occasions [Aʿlam 2001].

Rose water (*golāb*) and wine (*sharāb*) were included in the gift package sent through Zeynal Beg Shamlu in 1621 [Junabadi 1999, *876*]. According to Manucci, Safavid envoy Budaq Beg brought "sixty cases of perfect rose-water" [Manucci 1907, 2, *51*]. 17th-century Dutch artist and traveler Cornelis De Bruyn notes that "though roses both red and white are there very common, they make a prodigious quantity of rose-water, which they send to India, and elsewhere" [Bruyn 1737, *227*]. In his memoirs, Jahāngir refers to the feast of abpashan. In the words of the author, "…courtiers sprayed rose water on each other and had a wonderful time" [Jahangirnama 199, *178*]. The ancient Inner Asian ceremonies of water sprinkling were of solar character because they were performed at the time of the sun's passage into the Capricorn [Malecka 1999, *31*; Esin 1969, *105*]. According to another version, in the festival of Abpashan, rosewater was sprinkled to invoke the memory of rainfall, which would put an end to famine[4]. Sometimes Shah ʿAbbās I himself attended this festival in person [Munshi 1978, 2, *984*, *1046*].

*Mumia*

A substance called mumia was believed to have healing qualities and be effective against poison [Herbert 1929, *61–62*; Manucci 1907, 1, *55–56*]. Mumia extraction was under the shah's monopoly and was frequently sent as a diplomatic gift (for more, see [Casale 2024]). The inclusion of mumia in the gift inventories reflected the effort of the Safavids to appeal to the personal interests of the Mughal ruler. Demands by the Mughal rulers for this substance had already been known to the Safavid court.

The contemporary chronicles also recorded the request for mumia as a gift by the Mughals. Mughal emperor Jahāngir dispatched his agents to purchase turquoise and mumia along with other items needed for the royal household. Shah ʿAbbās authorized Uwaisi Tupchi, who was one of his private servants, to hand over to Mughal purveyor Muhammad Chelebi six bags of turquoise earth, with 14 tolas of mumia. Jahāngir was displeased with the quality of

[4] See https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/27294

turquoise dust and Mumia (*mumiya*) sent by the Safavid ruler [Jahangirnama 1999, *143*].

*Religious gifts*

Contemporary Safavid and Mughal chroniclers very rarely mention the exchange of religious items as diplomatic gifts. Among religious articles, rosaries (*tasbih*) were occasionally offered as diplomatic gifts. For instance, around 1615, at Jahāngir's request, Shah ʿAbbās sent an agate rosary (*tasbih-iaqiq*), one piece of which came from the royal stores, while another had recently been brought for the shah from Mecca [BL, Or. 3482, *236a–b*; Islam 1979–1982, 1, *177*; Jahangirnama 1999, *186*]. Although there is no mention of the Qur'an among the diplomatic gifts exchanged between the Safavid and Mughal courts, Maasir-i-'Alamgiri records the presentation of a copy of the Qur'an alongside other gifts by Muhammad Taqi, the Safavid chief of the merchants, to Aurangzeb in 1699 [Saqi 1947, *247*]. It is not clear, however, whether Muhammad Taqi offered the gift of the Qur'an on his behalf or as a royal gift from the Safavid shah. It appears that the sectarian differences had no impact on the relationship between the Safavids and the Mughals [Guliyev 2024a, *523*].

Copies of the Qur'an figured prominently among the gifts presented, particularly by the Safavid embassies in 1568 and 1576 sent to congratulate Selim II (r. 1566–1574) and Murad III (r. 1574–1595), respectively, on their accession to the Ottoman throne. Despite being adversaries in times of war, the gifts of the Qur'an made by the Safavid rulers were intended to remind the Ottoman sultans of their shared Muslim identity and highlight their Muslim solidarity [Guliyev 2022, *62*].

*Gifts of Arms*

The arms symbolized power and military competence. In some ways, presenting weapon objects as gifts could be a sign of the trust and alliance between the exchanging parties. They were major and regular gift items along with textiles, animals, and jewelry. Military objects were highly prized in both Safavid and Mughal empires, and rulers, princes, and great amirs maintained large collections of elaborately decorated and embellished pieces.

In 1603, among the gifts brought by the Mughal ambassador Mir Muhammad Ma'sum Khan Mokri was a scabbard and coat of mail wrought of gold and studded with small diamonds and other costly jewels. According to Munshi, "the gift of a sword, coming at this

particular time from a descendant of Timur, who had always triumphed over his Indian and Afghan enemies, was hailed as a happy augury of the Shah's ultimate victory in Azerbaijan and Shirvan" [Munshi 1978, 2, *837–838*].

It appears that a jeweled dagger and a sword as diplomatic gifts were offered by the Mughals, particularly on the occasions of the coronation of the Safavid rulers. For instance, in 1629, Mughal envoy Mir Baraka was charged with the delivery of a costly jeweled dagger and sword as presents, along with a letter containing Shah Jahān's congratulations on Shah Safi's coronation and condolences on the death of Shah ʿAbbās I [Ināyat Khān 1990, *84*]. Gifts of Mirza Muhammad Akbar, Aurangzeb's fourth son, to Shah Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722) on his coronation were a dagger full of crystal cutting work, a punch dagger (*jamdar*) studded with all fiery rubies and some watery jewels, and other gifts [Nasiri 1994, *114*].

According to Thomas Roe, 40 muskets were among other gifts Safavid envoy Muhammad Riza Beg brought for the Mughal ruler in 1616 [Roe 1926, *259*]. In 1637, the Mughal envoy Husaini was appointed to proceed to the Safavid court and was entrusted with the delivery of a letter to Shah Safi, together with a jeweled sword, in addition to other gifts [Ināyat Khān 1990, *207*; Munshi and Isfahani 1938, *209*]. In 1661, Safavid envoy Budaq Beg brought four Damascus short-swords and the same number of poniards (daggers) covered with precious stones [Manucci 1907, 2, *50–51*].

Safavid and Mughal rulers preferred sword or dagger handles of this ivory to hilts of gold or silver. Walrus tusk was especially prized for making knife and sword hafts. The collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum includes a walrus ivory-hilted royal sword in the name of Shah Tahmāsp (r. 1524–1576) that displays numerous signatures on the blades. In his Memoirs, the emperor Jahāngir tells how delighted he was when he received from Shah ʿAbbās I a rare jewelled dagger hilt of striated and mottled fish tooth [Jahangirnama 1999, *306–307*]. Perhaps this color was created artificially through the fossilizing process to increase the toughness of the material. He was so impressed by this dagger that he dispatched his agents to bring mottled fish teeth "from wherever and whomever at any price" [Jahangirnama 1999, *307*]. According to Della Valle, in 1619, the Mughal envoy's gift package included "a large animal tooth carried by two men; it had to be an elephant or fish." He adds that these are esteemed

here to make handles of knives or other weapons [Della Valle 1843, Vol. 1, *833–834*].

The ivory was prized because it was believed to be an antidote to poison, and also to reduce swellings, which added greatly to its value [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 1, *342*; Laufer 1925, *48–49*].

*Spoils of war as diplomatic gifts*

Valuables captured as spoils in a successful expedition were highly favoured as gifts, for besides being gifts, they were also tokens of victory [Islam 1970, *228–229*]. As irrefutable evidence of a triumph, they could aim to manifest the military might and commemorate the glory of the sender.

In his letter to Akbar, probably dating from 1014/1605, Shah ʿAbbās I after giving an account of the war with the Ottomans, mentions that following the recapture of Ganja and Shirwan, he would send an embassy to the Mughal court with the Ottoman articles captured during recent warfare [Islam 1979–1982, Vol. 1, *138–139*]. Gifts originating from the spoils of war sent to Emperor Jahāngir by Shah ʿAbbās I in July 1624 announced his victory over the Ottomans and the capture of Baghdad [Munshi 1978, 3, *1233*].

In 1638, Shah Jahān received 3 Ottoman guns of large caliber along with 12 horses sent by Shah Safi from the spoils taken after the recapture of Iravan [Ināyat Khān 1990, *244*]. In 1620–1621, as gifts to Shah ʿAbbās I, Jahāngir sent "precious articles from the booty of the Deccan" along with other presents [Ināyat Khān 1990, *9*].

Captured animals were also offered along with weapons and other objects of booty. For example, a horse named *Rūm-ratan* ("the jewel of Turkey"), which Jahāngir gave to his son Khurram (Shah Jahān), had previously been sent as a gift by Shah ʿAbbās out of the spoils of the Ottoman camp [Jahangirnama 1999, *365*]. In 1655/1656, Shah ʿAbbās II sent the Ottoman sultan Muhammad IV (r. 1648–87) an elephant from the spoils taken following the defeat of the final Mughal expedition to Qandahar in September 1653. In his letter to the Ottoman sultan, the shah indicates that "as it is customary to send samples of the materials of the conquered territories, he is sending as a present an elephant – one of the rare creations of God" [BL, Ms. Add. 7690, 3a; Islam 1979–1982, 2, *334*].

*Safavid equestrian equipment gifts*

Equestrian items held a prominent place in Safavid gift packages. Safavid horses were held in high esteem in the Mughal Empire. Horses

were highly treasured diplomatic gifts and much appreciated by Mughal rulers, many of whom had stables [Ain-i-Akbari 1927, 1, *140–141*]. Horses were symbols of majesty, power, and courage. Horses with lavish trappings, particularly golden and bejewelled saddles, were among the major emblematic gift items given by the Safavid rulers that constantly feature in the chronicles. Luxury horse trapping was another way to highlight the importance of this animal in the context of Safavid gift offerings to the Mughal court.

When Shah ʿAbbās offered Jahāngir 27 horses, 9 of them were decked out with precious stones, and saddles decorated with pearls [Manucci 1907, 2, *50–51*; Tavernier 1925, 1, *298*]. The saddles were integral parts of the gift horses' trapping, not a separate individual offering. However, in some instances, golden saddles were sent as a separate diplomatic gift independently from the horse. For example, Munshi reports that jeweled saddles, and saddles of gold and silver, which, according to him, "are the best ornament of armies", were part of the gift package sent to Jahāngir through the embassy of Zeynal Beg [Munshi 1978, Vol. 3, *1216*]. Mughal ruler Aurangzeb particularly admired sets of horse furniture brought by the Safavid envoy in 1661, which were ornamented with "superb embroidery and with small pearls, and very beautiful turquoises" [Bernier 1916, *148*].

The saddle was inevitably a prestigious object in pre-modern societies, and it featured commonly as a royal gift. It was also among the items as those status markers in Safavid and Mughal cultures. A saddled horse was traditionally considered an insignia of power, social status, and prestige [Munshi 1978, 2, *605, 907*]. The Safavids also managed to display their refined handicrafts by presenting different kinds of horse saddles. Diplomatic gifts, thus, functioned as agents of cultural self-representation.

*Astrological instruments*

Astronomical instruments, particularly astrolabes, were among the Safavid gifts favoured by the Mughal rulers. During the period in question, astrolabes were fashioned in the royal workshops (*buyutat*), and to make and decorate one's own instrument became a work of art [Winter 1986, *595*].

In his letter to Jahāngir, probably dated 1026/1617, Shah ʿAbbās I mentions the arrival of Haji Rafiq from the court of Jahāngir. The Haji mentioned the desire of the Emperor to have the astrolabe of Ulugh Beg. A group of astronomers and mathematicians has been

commanded to prepare a replica of the astrolabe so that the original may be sent to Jahāngir [BL, Or. 3482, *233a–234a*; Islam 1979–1982, Vol. 183]. According to another version of that letter, being himself interested in astronomy, Shah ʿAbbās has ordered a copy of the astrolabe to be prepared so that the original may be sent to Jahāngir [BL, Or. 3482, *234a–235a*; Islam 1979–1982, 1, *184*]. This gift also represented a souvenir or a commemorative object.

*"Humans as Gifts"*

In Safavid-Mughal gift exchanges, we can find a case of gifting humans. Khwjagī Asad, who had been sent by Babur to congratulate Tahmāsp on his accession to the Safavid throne, returned with a Safavid envoy named Suleyman Turkmān who amongst other gifts brought two Circassian girls (*qīzlār*) [Babur-nama 1921, *540*]. According to Gulbadan Begum, the two Circassian slaves Gulnār Āghācha and Nārgul Āghācha, whom Ṭahmāsp made a gift to Bābur in 1527, later became recognized ladies of the Mughal royal household [Gulbadan Begum 1902, *70*].

*"Gendered gifts"*

The chroniclers report only those gifts offered to the rulers and male dignitaries of the Safavid and Mughal dynasties, but it cannot be excluded that personal gifts to female notables were also involved. This was done mainly to gain the goodwill and support of royal women who figured prominently within internal dynastic politics.

The relatively high standing that women enjoyed in Turco-Mongol traditions could result in high political stations for noble women (for more, see [Szuppe 2003]). Safavid and Mughal women displayed a certain degree of visibility in the public sphere and were prevalent in the political arena. One of the letters that the Mughal envoy Bhakari brought had been written by Shah ʿAbbās's aunt to Miriam – Makani, a mother of Akbar [Akbarnama 1907–1939, 3, *1251*]. European envoys and agents were also aware of the role played by the Mughal noblewomen in internal dynastic politics. For instance, Sir Thomas Roe reported that when he visited Jahāngir's court, he brought three European hats as gifts, "for that his women liked them" [Roe 1926, *349*].

**5. The custom of displaying gifts**

Displaying diplomatic gifts was a long-established custom in the medieval and early modern courts and was intended more likely to advertise the honour received before a large audience of officials and

show royal appreciation. Diplomatic gift display as a performative aspect of gift-giving was not only aimed at courtiers, but it also carried a message to the local audience as well. The gifts received should be displayed before the host ruler, including the wild animals and textiles. Sometimes the gifts received were displayed in public, and these gifts, 'remained in people's memories for a long time'. This was mainly done in the case of special embassies with lavish gifts or to demonstrate close relations with the gift giver.

As soon as the Safavid or Mughal rulers received the news of the arrival of the envoys from each other, they sent a royal messenger with a royal decree (*farmān*) and a robe of honour (*khil'a*) for the envoys, as well as to accompany the envoy to the court honourably. The governors and local officials of the provinces where foreign envoys used to pass through were obliged to entertain and escort them.

The lavish gifts proceeded with the envoys as they were accompanied to the court. In both Safavid and Mughal practices, in the case of special embassies, diplomatic gifts were paraded publicly, each individual piece carried by a separate bearer. When the Mughal embassy led by Ziya al Mulk (Mīrzā Zīā al-Din) visited the Safavid capital Qazvin, the Meydān-e Saādatābād was illuminated and the bazaars decorated in their honor, and for several days they were guests at special banquets given in the Meydān [Munshi 1978, 2, *705–706*]. Sometimes, envoys were not given the opportunity to display all the gifts they brought. For instance, Shah ʿAbbās granted the Mughal envoy Khan Alam one day to display the gifts he brought and instructed him to show a few choice articles in each category [Munshi 1978, 3, *1160*].

Safavid princes also participated in diplomatic relations. Sometimes they dispatched envoys to the Mughal court and wrote diplomatic letters. In 1572, Yar Ali Beg Turkman with twenty Qizilbash came as the envoy of Sultan Muhammad Mirza, son of Shah Tahmāsp and then the governor of Khurasan, with gifts, particularly horses [Akbarnama 1907–1939, Vol. 3, *7*; Qandhari 1993, *191*]. In some cases, in addition to Mughal rulers and princes, the Safavid envoys also offered gifts to the Mughal dignitaries. For instance, in 1554, a Safavid envoy Kamaladdin Ulugh Beg brought a robe for Bairam Khan [Akbarnama 1907–1939, Vol. 1, *612*; Islam 1970, *47*].

Symbolic language was at the center of diplomatic encounters. Gifts were not only material objects but also symbols of friendly intentions and trust, as well as power. Therefore, the content of royal

gifts was more symbolic and cultural. Similar to the diplomatic gifts sent to the Ottoman court, those sent to the Mughal rulers were chosen to display Safavid's specialties (objects) with the intention of preserving good relations with the Mughals.

**6. Conclusion**

Safavid and Mughal courts shared a common ground of diplomatic gift-giving practices that were shaped by a series of similar habits, rites, and expectations. The Safavid and Mughal gift-giving practices were influenced by Turco-Mongol and Islamic heritage, and in many aspects, they inherited notions of gift-giving from their predecessors. The Safavid and Mughal rulers held one another in the highest esteem and frequently exchanged gifts. Both Safavid and Mughal envoys had a shared understanding of the importance of gifts as a means of conveying political messages, honouring the host ruler, and smoothing the way for negotiations. In Mughal-Safavid diplomatic encounters, gifts mainly conveyed messages of friendship, power, and trust. The display of cultural affinity and close bonds between these two polities was manifested and materialized in the carefully selected gifts. In most cases, both Mughal and Safavid rulers personally inspected the diplomatic gifts received from their counterparts.

Animals, particularly horses and falcons, horse equipment (saddles), textiles, gemstones, and jewels were common diplomatic gifts from the Safavid court. The Mughal rulers mainly offered textiles and animals of exotic or rare nature to their Safavid counterparts. Textiles were also the most common types of gifts given by both sides. Both the Safavids and Mughals attached great importance to textiles in their choice of diplomatic gifts. For their lavish materials and elaborate designs, textiles were highly valued by them as the gifts. Gift exchanges served as a medium for the Safavids and Mughals to display their refined handicrafts. Textile gifts also provide insights into divergent consumption patterns at the Safavid and Mughal courts.

Both courts paid attention to variety and quantity. Often, the value of reciprocated gifts exceeded that of the presents received. However, they avoided sending objects that were not a real rarity at their place of destination. The rarity of gifts was positively correlated with their value. Some gifts were prized for their rarity rather than their material value. Contemporary chroniclers and diplomatic correspondence between these two courts refer to the 'desired gifts' mostly as 'rarities' or 'choice objects'. Rare gifts received from one country were

sometimes sent as presents to another. The Safavid shahs used to send gifts received from the Ottoman Empire to the Mughals. Throughout the mutual diplomatic gift exchanges, the Safavid and Mughal rulers, particularly Shah ʿAbbās and Jahāngir, frequently made requests for specific gifts from each other.

Diplomatic gifts exchanged between the Mughal and Safavid courts articulated the range of political and commercial links of the sending party. Gift exchanges with the Mughals provided opportunities for the Safavids to not only showcase the best of their manufacturing but also display the range of goods they could access in Europe.

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## “ДАРИ, ГІДНІ ЙОГО ІМЕНІ”: МАТЕРІАЛЬНІ АСПЕКТИ ДИПЛОМАТИЧНИХ ОБМІНІВ МІЖ СЕФЕВІДАМИ ТА МОГОЛАМИ

Дарування подарунків було загальноприйнятою практикою в ранньомодерних дипломатичних контекстах. Обмін подарунками становив невід’ємну та важливу частину дипломатії Сефевідів і Моголів. Незважаючи на випадкові спалахи ворожнечі, стосунки між Моголами та Сефевідами в основному відзначалися згодою та повагою до життєвоважливих інтересів один одного. Протягом шістнадцятого та сімнадцятого століть правителі держав Сефевідів і Великих Моголів обмінювалися незліченними подарунками. Роль подарунків у їхніх дипломатичних зустрічах особливо очевидна як із численних згадок у місцевих хроніках, так і з реакції правителів на пропоновані їм дари. Сефевіди та Моголи розглядали обмін дипломатичними подарунками як питання політичного значення, використовуючи їх, щоб впливати на дипломатичні відносини між своїми державами. Подарунки супроводжували посольства, які відправлялися з різними цілями, включаючи, але не обмежуючись, привітання зі сходженням на престол, висловлення співчуття, інформування контрагента про перемоги, доставку “листа перемог” або участь у святі обрізання. Відображення культурної спорідненості та тісних зв’язків між цими двома державами виявлялося та матеріалізувалося в ретельно відібраних подарунках. Дарування завжди було важливою темою в галузі антропології з моменту публікації соціолога Марселя Мосса “Есе про подарунки” 1925 р. Хоча наявна історіографія відзначає важливу роль дарування подарунків у встановленні дипломатичних та економічних відносин, мало було зроблено для вивчення історії відносин Сефевідів і Моголів з точки зору матеріальної культури. Вони в основному аналізувалися через призму політичних відносин, і, відповідно, обмін дарами зазвичай обговорювався як частина більшої теми дипломатичних відносин між двома державами. Спираючись на сучасні хроніки Сефевідів і Моголів, а також на європейські подорожні нотатки, пропонована стаття намагається дослідити, як функціонував обмін подарунками в дипломатичних відносинах між цими державами.

**Ключові слова:** Сефевіди, Імперія Великих Моголів, відносини Сефевідів і Великих Моголів, дипломатія доби раннього нового часу, дипломатичні подарунки, дарування подарунків, XVI–XVII століття

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